

Emeril Lagassi Cheesecake Recipe



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emeril lagassi cheesecake recipe brings to mind rich, decadent flavors and the culinary expertise of a renowned chef. This article delves into the art of crafting Emeril Lagasse's signature cheesecake, offering a comprehensive guide for home bakers. We'll explore the essential ingredients, step-by-step instructions, and tips for achieving that perfect, creamy texture. From understanding the nuances of creating a flawless crust to mastering the delicate art of baking and cooling, this guide covers all aspects of preparing Emeril's celebrated cheesecake. Whether you're a seasoned baker or just starting, you'll find valuable insights into elevating your cheesecake game with this iconic recipe.

Unveiling the Emeril Lagasse Cheesecake Recipe: A Culinary Journey

The pursuit of the perfect cheesecake is a culinary quest for many, and when the name Emeril Lagasse is attached, expectations soar. His approach to classic dishes often involves a blend of refined technique and bold flavors, and his cheesecake is no exception. This iconic dessert is celebrated for its incredibly smooth texture, rich cream cheese base, and often a delightful surprise in its flavor profile. This guide is dedicated to dissecting the Emeril Lagasse cheesecake recipe, providing you with the knowledge and confidence to recreate this restaurant-quality dessert in your own kitchen.

We will navigate through the foundational elements of this celebrated recipe, starting with the crucial components that define its success. Understanding each ingredient's role, from the type of cream cheese to the specific sweeteners and flavorings, is paramount. Beyond the ingredients, the methodology is key. The article will break down the preparation process into manageable steps, ensuring that even complex techniques are accessible to the home baker. From the initial mixing to the final chilling, every stage contributes to the ultimate outcome.

Furthermore, this exploration aims to equip you with the insights needed to troubleshoot common cheesecake pitfalls. Achieving a crack-free, evenly baked cheesecake with a velvety smooth consistency is the goal, and we will share expert tips to help you reach that zenith. Whether it's achieving the ideal water bath temperature or understanding the importance of gentle mixing, these details make a significant difference. Prepare to embark on a flavorful adventure that culminates in a truly memorable Emeril Lagasse cheesecake.

The Foundation: Essential Ingredients for Emeril Lagasse Cheesecake

Crafting an exceptional Emeril Lagasse cheesecake begins with a meticulous selection of high-quality ingredients. The foundation of any great cheesecake is, of course, cream cheese, and for Emeril's recipe, using full-fat, block-style cream cheese is non-negotiable. This provides the necessary richness and stability for a creamy, dense texture. Avoid the spreadable cream cheese in tubs, as its higher moisture content can lead to a less desirable outcome.

Sugar plays a vital role not only in sweetness but also in the texture of the cheesecake. While Emeril's recipe typically calls for granulated sugar, the precise amount ensures a balance that allows the cream cheese flavor to shine. Eggs are the binding agents that contribute to the cheesecake's structure and custard-like consistency. It's crucial to ensure your eggs are at room temperature, as this aids in smooth incorporation and prevents the batter from becoming lumpy.

The dairy component often includes sour cream or heavy cream, which adds further richness and a subtle tang that cuts through the sweetness. Again, room temperature is key for these ingredients to meld seamlessly with the cream cheese mixture. Vanilla extract is essential for its aromatic qualities, enhancing the overall flavor profile. High-quality vanilla extract will impart a more complex and satisfying taste than imitation varieties.

For the crust, a classic graham cracker crust is often featured in Emeril's creations. This typically involves crushed graham crackers, a binder like melted butter, and a touch of sugar for sweetness and caramelization. The butter coats the crumbs, creating a cohesive base that holds its shape during baking and cooling.

Selecting the Right Cream Cheese

The choice of cream cheese is arguably the most critical factor in achieving the signature texture of an Emeril Lagasse cheesecake. For a dense, creamy, and stable cheesecake, opt for full-fat cream cheese that comes in solid blocks. These blocks contain a lower percentage of water and stabilizers compared to whipped or low-fat versions, which can result in a softer, less structured cake that may be prone to cracking or a watery consistency.

Ensure the cream cheese is softened to room temperature before you begin mixing. This allows for smoother incorporation into the batter, preventing lumps and ensuring a uniformly creamy texture. Cold cream cheese will resist blending, leading to a grainy or uneven batter.

The Importance of Room Temperature Ingredients

Achieving a truly luscious Emeril Lagasse cheesecake hinges on the proper

temperature of your ingredients. Cream cheese, eggs, and any dairy additions like sour cream or heavy cream should all be at room temperature. This is not merely a suggestion but a crucial step in the baking process.

When ingredients are at the same ambient temperature, they emulsify more effectively. This means the fat from the cream cheese will blend smoothly with the liquid from the eggs and dairy, creating a homogenous batter. Cold ingredients, on the other hand, will cause the fat to seize up, resulting in lumps and an uneven texture that is difficult to overcome, even with vigorous mixing. Room temperature also helps prevent the batter from curdling.

Flavor Enhancers: Vanilla, Citrus, and More

While the creamy, rich base is paramount, Emeril Lagasse's recipes often incorporate nuanced flavor enhancers that elevate the cheesecake beyond the ordinary. Vanilla extract is a standard, but the quality of the vanilla can make a noticeable difference. Pure vanilla extract offers a more complex and aromatic profile than imitation varieties.

Depending on the specific variation of Emeril's cheesecake you're preparing, you might also find ingredients like lemon zest or orange zest. These citrus elements provide a bright, refreshing counterpoint to the richness of the cream cheese, cutting through the sweetness and adding a layer of complexity. A pinch of salt is also often included to amplify the other flavors and balance the sweetness.

Mastering the Graham Cracker Crust: Emeril's Technique

The crust of a cheesecake is as important as the filling itself, providing a textural contrast and a flavorful foundation. Emeril Lagasse's approach to the graham cracker crust is typically straightforward yet yields a perfectly sturdy and delicious base. The key lies in the ratio of crumbs to butter and the method of pressing it into the pan.

Typically, the process begins with finely crushed graham crackers. Using a food processor is the most efficient way to achieve a consistent crumb texture. Some bakers prefer to lightly toast the crumbs before mixing with butter and sugar to enhance their flavor and crispness. However, for a standard Emeril-style crust, this step is often omitted to allow the crust to bake and firm up alongside the filling.

The melted butter acts as the binder, coating the crumbs and holding them together. The amount of butter is critical; too little and the crust will be crumbly and fall apart, while too much can make it greasy and heavy. A touch of sugar is often added to the crumb mixture to enhance sweetness and aid in caramelization during baking.

Achieving the Perfect Crust Texture

The ideal graham cracker crust for an Emeril Lagasse cheesecake should be firm enough to hold its shape when sliced, yet tender enough to break apart easily with a fork. This balance is achieved through the correct ratio of graham cracker crumbs to melted butter. A common guideline is about 1 ½ cups of finely crushed graham crackers to 6 tablespoons of melted butter.

Pressing the crumb mixture firmly and evenly into the bottom and up the sides

of the springform pan is essential. Use the bottom of a glass or a measuring cup to compact the crumbs. This dense packing helps the crust bind together and prevents it from crumbling when the cheesecake is served.

Pre-baking the Crust (Optional but Recommended)

While not always a mandatory step in every cheesecake recipe, pre-baking the graham cracker crust can significantly improve its texture and prevent it from becoming soggy. Pre-baking the crust for 8-10 minutes at a moderate temperature, such as 350°F (175°C), allows the butter to meld with the crumbs and set them into a more stable base.

This pre-baking step helps to create a slightly crisper crust that will hold up better against the moist cheesecake filling. Once pre-baked, allow the crust to cool slightly before adding the cheesecake batter. This prevents the cold batter from shocking the hot crust, which can sometimes lead to cracking.

Crafting the Creamy Cheesecake Filling: Step-by-Step

The heart of the Emeril Lagasse cheesecake recipe lies in its velvety smooth filling. The process requires careful attention to detail to ensure a rich, creamy, and lump-free result. The foundation of the filling is, of course, softened cream cheese, which is then combined with sugar, eggs, and flavorings.

The key to a superior cheesecake filling is gradual incorporation and minimal aeration. Over-mixing or beating the batter too vigorously can introduce too much air, which can lead to cracking during baking and an undesirable porous texture. Emeril's technique emphasizes gentle, steady mixing.

After creaming the softened cream cheese, sugar is gradually added and mixed until just combined. The eggs are then added one at a time, with each egg being incorporated before the next is added. This ensures that the eggs are fully emulsified into the cream cheese mixture, contributing to the smooth, custardy texture.

Flavorings like vanilla extract and any citrus zest are then gently folded in. The batter should be smooth, thick, and homogenous. It's crucial to scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl frequently to ensure all ingredients are thoroughly incorporated without overworking the mixture.

The Art of Creaming Cream Cheese

The initial creaming of the cream cheese is a foundational step that sets the stage for a smooth filling. Start with softened cream cheese, ensuring it's pliable and free of lumps. Using a stand mixer with a paddle attachment or a hand mixer on medium speed, cream the cream cheese until it is completely smooth and airy. This process should take several minutes, and it's vital to scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl periodically to ensure even creaming.

The goal here is to create a light and fluffy base, free from any granular texture. This smooth foundation will allow the other ingredients to incorporate seamlessly, contributing to the overall creamy consistency of the final cheesecake. Avoid over-creaming, which can incorporate too much air,

potentially leading to cracks.

Gradual Sugar and Egg Incorporation

Once the cream cheese is perfectly creamed, the sugar is added. It's best to add the sugar gradually, in several additions, while the mixer is running on low speed. This allows the sugar to dissolve properly and become fully incorporated into the cream cheese mixture, contributing to a smooth texture.

Eggs are then introduced one at a time, and this is where gentle mixing is paramount. Beat each egg just until the yolk and white are combined with the cream cheese mixture, then immediately move on to the next. Over-beating the eggs can incorporate too much air, which is a common cause of cheesecake cracking. The goal is to bind the ingredients, not to whip them into a meringue.

Adding Flavorings and Ensuring Smoothness

With the cream cheese, sugar, and eggs incorporated, it's time to add the flavorings. This typically includes high-quality vanilla extract and, if the recipe calls for it, citrus zest. These should be added at a low speed or gently folded in with a spatula.

Scraping down the sides and bottom of the bowl is crucial throughout this process to ensure no unmixed ingredients remain. The final batter should be thick, smooth, and uniform in color, with no visible streaks of cream cheese or egg. A final gentle whisk or stir with a spatula can help ensure ultimate smoothness before pouring into the prepared crust.

Baking the Emeril Lagasse Cheesecake: Tips for Perfection

Baking a cheesecake is a delicate art, and Emeril Lagasse's recipe is no exception. The goal is to achieve an evenly baked cake with a creamy, set center and a smooth, uncracked surface. This often involves specific temperatures, timing, and techniques like the water bath.

The water bath, or bain-marie, is a crucial element in baking many cheesecakes, including those prepared using Emeril's methods. It involves placing the springform pan within a larger baking pan filled with hot water. This creates a humid environment, which helps to bake the cheesecake gently and evenly, preventing the edges from overcooking before the center is set and significantly reducing the risk of cracking.

The oven temperature is also a critical factor. Many cheesecake recipes, including Emeril's, call for a moderate baking temperature. This allows the cheesecake to cook through without developing a tough exterior or cracking. Patience is key; cheesecakes take time to bake properly.

Understanding the visual cues for doneness is also vital. A perfectly baked cheesecake will have slightly puffed edges that are set, while the center will still have a slight jiggle. It will continue to set as it cools.

The Crucial Water Bath Method

The water bath, or bain-marie, is a technique that is almost universally recommended for baking cheesecakes, and it's a cornerstone of achieving that signature smooth texture often associated with Emeril Lagasse's creations. To prepare a water bath, you'll need a larger baking pan, such as a roasting pan or a larger oven-safe skillet.

Wrap the outside of your springform pan tightly with several layers of heavy-duty aluminum foil. This is essential to prevent any water from seeping into the cheesecake. Then, place the foil-wrapped springform pan inside the larger baking pan. Carefully pour hot or boiling water into the larger pan, ensuring it comes about halfway up the sides of the springform pan.

The water bath provides gentle, even heat and creates a steamy environment in the oven. This combination helps the cheesecake to bake evenly, prevents the edges from drying out and cracking, and contributes to a uniformly creamy texture throughout the cake.

Oven Temperature and Baking Time

The oven temperature for baking an Emeril Lagasse cheesecake is typically set at a moderate heat, often around 325°F (160°C) or 350°F (175°C), depending on the specific recipe. A lower temperature allows for slower, more even cooking, which is essential for preventing cracks and achieving a creamy consistency.

Baking times can vary significantly based on the size and depth of the cheesecake, as well as the specifics of your oven. Generally, a cheesecake can take anywhere from 50 minutes to 1.5 hours or even longer to bake. The key indicator of doneness is not a completely firm center but rather a center that is still slightly jiggly, like gelatin.

As the cheesecake cools, the residual heat will continue to cook the center, allowing it to set perfectly. Over-baking can lead to a dry, rubbery texture and is a primary cause of cracking. It is always better to err on the side of slightly under-baked and allow it to finish setting during the cooling process.

Signs of Doneness and Avoiding Cracks

Recognizing when your Emeril Lagasse cheesecake is perfectly baked is a critical skill. As mentioned, the edges of the cheesecake should appear set and slightly puffed, with a subtle golden hue. The center, however, should still have a slight wobble when the pan is gently nudged. It should not be liquid, but rather have a texture akin to firm Jell-O.

To minimize the risk of cracks, several factors come into play. These include ensuring all ingredients are at room temperature, avoiding over-mixing, using a water bath, and not over-baking. Even with all precautions, a tiny crack might appear, but it won't detract from the deliciousness of the cake. If a crack does form, it can be artfully concealed with toppings like fruit, whipped cream, or a chocolate ganache.

The Crucial Cooling and Chilling Process

The journey of creating an Emeril Lagasse cheesecake doesn't end when it

comes out of the oven; the cooling and chilling process is just as vital for achieving that perfect texture and flavor. A proper cooling phase allows the cheesecake to set fully and prevents the dreaded cracking that can occur from rapid temperature changes.

Emeril's approach, like many classic cheesecake recipes, emphasizes a gradual cooling process. This typically begins by turning off the oven and allowing the cheesecake to sit in the cooling oven with the door ajar for a period. This allows the cheesecake to acclimate to the ambient temperature slowly.

Following this initial cooling, the cheesecake is then removed from the oven and cooled further on a wire rack at room temperature. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the chilling phase. Refrigeration allows the cheesecake to firm up completely, developing its dense, creamy texture and allowing the flavors to meld and deepen. A fully chilled cheesecake is essential for clean slicing and optimal flavor.

Gradual Cooling in the Oven

Once the cheesecake appears to be done - with set edges and a jiggly center - the first stage of cooling begins within the oven. Turn off the oven heat and prop the oven door open slightly with a wooden spoon or oven mitt. Leave the cheesecake in the oven for about an hour.

This gradual transition from oven heat to room temperature helps to prevent the cheesecake from collapsing or cracking due to a sudden drop in temperature. The residual heat in the oven will continue to gently set the cheesecake without further cooking.

Cooling on a Wire Rack

After the hour in the cooling oven, carefully remove the cheesecake from the water bath (if used) and place it on a wire rack at room temperature. Allow it to cool completely. This typically takes another 1-2 hours. During this time, the cheesecake will deflate slightly and the center will continue to set.

As the cheesecake cools on the wire rack, ensure it is uncovered. Covering it too soon can trap steam, which can make the top soggy. Resist the urge to slice into it at this stage; it needs the final chilling to achieve the proper consistency.

The Importance of Refrigeration

Chilling is the final, indispensable step in preparing an Emeril Lagasse cheesecake. Once the cheesecake has cooled to room temperature, it's time to transfer it to the refrigerator. It's advisable to cover the cheesecake loosely with plastic wrap or foil. Ensure the plastic wrap doesn't touch the surface of the cheesecake, as this can cause condensation and affect the texture.

The cheesecake needs to chill for a minimum of 6 hours, but preferably overnight, to allow the cream cheese to firm up completely and the flavors to fully develop. This extended chilling period is what transforms the still-somewhat-soft baked cheesecake into the dense, creamy, and sliceable dessert that Emeril's recipes are known for. Proper chilling ensures a clean slice and the best possible texture and taste.

Serving and Presentation of Emeril Lagasse Cheesecake

The presentation of an Emeril Lagasse cheesecake can be as simple or as elaborate as you desire. While the cheesecake itself is a star, a few thoughtful touches can elevate its visual appeal and complement its rich flavor. The goal is to enhance, not overpower, the decadent dessert.

Typically, Emeril's cheesecakes are served chilled and unadorned, allowing the inherent richness and creamy texture to take center stage. However, classic accompaniments like fresh berries, a dollop of whipped cream, or a fruit compote are always welcome. The vibrant colors of fresh fruit can provide a beautiful contrast to the pale, creamy cheesecake.

For a more decadent presentation, a drizzle of chocolate ganache, a caramel sauce, or a swirl of fruit coulis can be added. When slicing, using a sharp, thin knife dipped in hot water and wiped clean between each cut will ensure neat, professional-looking slices, revealing the smooth interior of the cheesecake.

Classic Toppings and Garnishes

While the Emeril Lagasse cheesecake is delicious on its own, classic toppings can enhance the dining experience. Fresh berries are a perennial favorite, offering a burst of tartness and vibrant color. Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries all work wonderfully.

A dollop of freshly whipped cream adds a light, airy counterpoint to the dense cheesecake. For a richer experience, a drizzle of warm caramel sauce or a dark chocolate ganache is always a welcome addition. Fruit compotes, made from cooked-down fruits like cherries or peaches, also provide a delightful flavor and texture combination.

Achieving a Clean Slice

To showcase the perfect texture of your Emeril Lagasse cheesecake, a clean slice is paramount. Before cutting, ensure the cheesecake is thoroughly chilled, as this is the most critical factor. Use a long, thin, sharp knife.

Dip the knife into a tall glass of hot water, then wipe it dry with a clean towel before making each cut. This lubricates the blade, allowing it to slice cleanly through the chilled cheesecake without dragging or distorting the shape. For the neatest slices, try not to saw back and forth too much; a smooth, steady downward motion is best.

Variations on Emeril's Cheesecake Theme

While this guide focuses on the core elements of an Emeril Lagasse cheesecake, the beauty of his culinary approach lies in his ability to adapt and innovate. Depending on the specific recipe you are following, there may be variations in flavorings, crusts, or toppings.

Some versions might incorporate a chocolate cookie crust instead of graham crackers, or introduce flavorings like espresso, pumpkin, or even a hint of spice. Exploring these variations can offer new and exciting ways to enjoy this beloved dessert, all while staying true to the foundational principles of Emeril's signature style.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the key to Emeril Lagasse's creamy cheesecake texture?

Emeril often emphasizes using room temperature ingredients, especially cream cheese and eggs, to ensure a smooth, lump-free batter. He also typically recommends a water bath (bain-marie) during baking, which provides gentle, even heat and prevents cracking, contributing to that signature creamy texture.

Are there specific crust variations commonly associated with Emeril's cheesecake recipes?

While a classic graham cracker crust is a frequent choice, Emeril has been known to experiment with other cookie crusts like vanilla wafers or even gingersnap cookies for a different flavor profile. The foundation is usually butter and a touch of sugar to bind the crumbs.

What are some popular flavor additions Emeril uses in his cheesecakes?

Emeril often infuses his cheesecakes with bold flavors. Popular additions include a swirl of fruit compote (like berry or cherry), a hint of citrus zest (lemon or orange), or even a mocha or caramel flavor for a richer dessert experience.

What is the best way to prevent Emeril Lagasse's cheesecake from cracking?

The most effective method Emeril advocates for preventing cheesecake cracks is baking in a water bath. This involves placing the springform pan in a larger roasting pan filled with hot water. The steam created provides moisture and gentle, even heat, which is crucial for a crack-free top.

How long should Emeril Lagasse's cheesecake cool and chill before serving?

Proper cooling and chilling are vital for Emeril's cheesecakes. After baking, it's essential to let the cheesecake cool gradually in the oven with the door slightly ajar, then at room temperature. For optimal firmness and flavor, it should then chill in the refrigerator for at least 4-6 hours, or preferably overnight.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Emeril Lagasse's cheesecake recipes, each starting with :

1. *Emeril's Ultimate Cheesecakes*

This collection showcases Emeril Lagasse's signature approach to creating decadent cheesecakes. It delves into classic preparations with his signature

Creole and Cajun twists, offering both straightforward recipes and more elaborate variations. Readers will find tips for achieving the perfect texture and flavor, making it a go-to guide for any cheesecake enthusiast.

2. The Soul of the Southern Cheesecake

While not exclusively Emeril, this book captures the spirit of Southern comfort food, often featuring cheesecake recipes with a distinct regional flair. It explores ingredients and techniques that define beloved Southern desserts, including how Emeril might incorporate them into his own recipes. Expect recipes that are rich, creamy, and full of soul.

3. Baking with Bam! Creamy Creations

This title highlights Emeril's energetic personality and his passion for baking, focusing specifically on dairy-rich desserts. It offers a variety of cheesecake recipes, from no-bake wonders to intricately layered masterpieces. The book provides step-by-step guidance, making complex techniques accessible to home bakers.

4. Emeril's Sweet Sensations: Cheesecakes & More

This comprehensive baking book expands beyond just cheesecakes to cover a range of Emeril's delightful desserts, with a strong emphasis on his cheesecake expertise. It includes recipes for various cheesecake styles, such as New York-style, Italian ricotta, and fruit-infused variations. Readers can expect his characteristic enthusiasm and practical advice throughout.

5. A Taste of New Orleans: Cheesecake Edition

This book explores the culinary heritage of New Orleans, with cheesecakes playing a prominent role. It likely features recipes that draw inspiration from the city's vibrant food scene, a style that Emeril Lagasse has masterfully embodied. Discover how local flavors can elevate the humble cheesecake to extraordinary heights.

6. The Art of the Perfect Crust: Cheesecake Foundations

Focusing on the crucial elements of cheesecake making, this book would delve into the science and art behind a perfect crust and filling. It would offer detailed explanations of different crust options and techniques for achieving unparalleled creaminess in the cheesecake itself. Expect insights that Elevate your cheesecake game to a professional level.

7. Emeril's Family Favorites: Cheesecake Delights

This book presents a collection of approachable and crowd-pleasing recipes from Emeril's personal repertoire, with a special section dedicated to his cherished cheesecakes. It emphasizes recipes that are perfect for sharing with loved ones, offering comfort and joy in every bite. These are the cheesecakes Emeril himself would make for his own family gatherings.

8. Modern Cheesecakes: Innovative Flavors from a Culinary Legend

This title suggests a contemporary take on cheesecake, showcasing how Emeril Lagasse might experiment with modern flavor pairings and presentation. It would explore exciting ingredient combinations and innovative techniques for creating unique and memorable cheesecakes. Prepare for a journey into the cutting edge of cheesecake artistry.

9. Emeril's Kitchen Essentials: Baking for Beginners

Designed for novice bakers, this book provides fundamental techniques and approachable recipes, including a straightforward yet delicious cheesecake. It demystifies the process of baking, offering clear instructions and helpful tips to build confidence in the kitchen. This book makes Emeril's renowned cheesecake accessible to everyone.

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